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PP RUEHDH
DE RUEHRH #0031/01 0051525
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2237
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN PRIORITY 0425
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0535

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000031

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP JHARRIS AND JBERNDT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/05/2020

TAGS: PGOV SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI LEADERSHIP PROFILES: PRINCE SULTAN BIN SALMAN

REF: 09 RIYADH 1434

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Classified By: Ambassador James B. Smith for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶1. (C) During a warm introductory meeting with Ambassador Smith on January 2, Secretary General of the Supreme Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) Prince Sultan bin Salman discussed his desire to foster a better understanding of Saudi Arabia, its people, and its culture through increased tourism and by highlighting its unique heritage. Sultan spoke of the importance of U.S. - Saudi partnership, especially in science and technology, and readily accepted the Ambassador's invitation to co-host the Embassy's 2010 National Day celebration in March. Sultan followed the Ambassador's National Day request with one of his own - U.S. support for the SCTA's push to designate al-Diriyah, an historical site in Riyadh, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Well-known for his famous voyage into outer space and a rising star among King Abdulaziz's grandsons, Sultan is a progressive royal who believes in a strong U.S. - Saudi bilateral relationship. (Note: Sultan is one of only a handful of King Abdulaziz's grandsons to hold ministerial rank - ref A. End Note.) With a powerful father who is the Governor of Riyadh and a strong candidate to be the next crown-prince, Sultan is well positioned to move up the Saudi government ranks. End Summary and Comment.

FOSTERING UNDERSTANDING: SAUDI CIVILIZATION

¶2. (SBU) Secretary General of the Supreme Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) Prince Sultan bin Salman warmly received Ambassador Smith on January 2. In a relaxed and friendly manner, Sultan discussed the importance of Saudi heritage and his push as Secretary General of the SCTA to increase tourism within Saudi Arabia. Sultan opined that Saudi Arabia is often known only for its oil and as the "Land of Islam," rather than for its rich and unique heritage.

¶3. (SBU) In an effort to foster a better understanding of Saudi heritage, the SCTA is launching a massive campaign this year, which will showcase Saudi heritage around the world and, "receive an enormous amount of international coverage" according to Sultan. The campaign will kickoff with a special Saudi "civilization" exhibition at the Louvre in Paris during Summer 2010 - the peak tourist period for the Louvre noted Sultan. (Note: An invitation to the grand-opening was extended to the Ambassador. End Note.) The exhibition, which will include lectures and Saudi treasures and antiques, will travel to many famous museums

around the world over a period of 3-5 years, including multiple destinations in the U.S.

¶14. (SBU) Sultan expressed his hope that by putting Saudi heritage on the international scene, Saudi Arabia would become a greater tourist destination. (Comment: Sultan seemed to be aware of the balance he is forced to strike between increasing tourism and Saudi's conservative religious establishment. References were made to "tour groups" as opposed to individual non-Muslims being allowed to visit the Kingdom on their own. He clarified that Muslims traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj or Umrah fall under the Ministry of Hajj, not the SCTA. End Comment.)

¶15. (SBU) Sultan mentioned that he and his wife, Princess Haifa bint Saud al-Faisal bin Abdulaziz, founded the Turath (Heritage) Organization, a non-profit created to preserve and promote Saudi heritage. Currently, the organization is working on a documentary entitled, "Heroes of Heritage," highlighting people from around the world who have gone to great lengths to preserve their own country's heritage. During this discussion, Sultan was passionate and appeared genuine in his belief that through improved cultural understanding of Saudi Arabia's heritage and unique customs and traditions, misconceptions of the country could be overcome and stronger partnerships forged, especially between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

NATIONAL DAY 2010

¶16. (SBU) Sultan quickly and enthusiastically accepted the Ambassador's offer to co-host the Embassy's 2010 National Day celebration on March 24. With the 25th anniversary of his

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space expedition approaching later this Spring, Sultan was eager to highlight U.S. - Saudi partnerships in science and technology, the theme of our 2010 National Day. Sultan also capitalized on the theme of partnerships, requesting U.S. support for the SCTA's push to designate an historical site in Riyadh -- al-Diriyah -- as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Ambassador stated that this was a possibility and, after looking into the situation, would get back to Sultan with an official U.S. position.

A PROGRESSIVE WHO SHARES THE KING'S VISION

¶17. (C) A progressive who is technologically savvy and popularly-known in Saudi society as the "Astronaut Prince," Sultan was intelligent, charismatic and affable during his meeting with the Ambassador, and extended several invitations to the Ambassador to visit his farm. Referring to King Abdullah as a "breath of fresh air" and a "doer," Sultan applauded the King's reform agenda, particularly education reform, stating that "the best chance for the future of humanity is with the next generation." He agreed with the Ambassador's assessment, however, that the biggest problem facing King Abdullah was creating new jobs. Referring to his own son who is almost 20 and attends St. Andrew's University in Scotland, Sultan recognized the importance of understanding and talking to the next generation -- a reason why President Obama was so successful in the elections according to Sultan's son whom he proudly quoted and agreed with.

UNDERSTANDING THE U.S.: A PILOT'S PERSPECTIVE

¶18. (C) Since learning to fly in the mid 1970s while attending undergraduate and graduate school in the U.S., Sultan has visited almost every state. He joked with the

Ambassador that "perhaps the only states he has not yet visited are the Dakotas." Sultan expressed respect and admiration for the American people and culture, stating that "some of the best days of my life were in the U.S." and that he hopes to "live and fly in the U.S. again someday."

(Comment: Sultan shared a few personal stories with the Ambassador that demonstrated that his years living, studying, and flying in the U.S. positively impacted his view of the U.S. and U.S. - Saudi relations. End Comment.)

¶19. (SBU) Sultan's love of flying does not appear to have lessened over the years. Both the Ambassador and Sultan exchanged stories of flying and talked about mutual friends in the field of aviation. Sultan mentioned that every year he returns to the Oshkosh Air Show in Wisconsin. Although he used to train with Gulf Stream in Georgia, Sultan now trains with Emirate Airlines. Sultan told the Ambassador that "being a bush pilot is a hidden passion," and that he often flies within Saudi Arabia and in the Alps. Along with flying, Sultan is an avid skier and mentioned that he would be taking a business/pleasure vacation in the French Alps this winter.

SMITH